

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN APPROACHES TO EPISTEMOLOGY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO B. K. MATILAL

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Abstract

Epistemology is one of the oldest branches of philosophy that is basically concerned with the scope and aim of knowledge, the means of knowledge, and the justification of knowledge. There are instances in the Western tradition where philosophy is reduced to mere epistemology. But there are also systems or schools of thought that balance epistemology with metaphysics. For my present study I have chosen one of the most distinguished contemporary Indian philosophers, B.K. Matilal. I propose to discuss how he understands this balance.

I

Epistemology is one of the oldest branches of philosophy that is basically concerned with the scope and aim of knowledge, the means of knowledge, and the justification of knowledge. There are instances in the Western tradition where philosophy is reduced to epistemology. For example, the Continental rationalists and the classical British empiricists found nothing more enterprising than epistemology in their respective doctrines. We find a similar case with metaphysics. For example, in the philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger the focus on metaphysics is conspicuous. But there are also systems or schools of thought that have a balanced view as regards the nature of epistemology and metaphysics for they believe that these two traditional branches of philosophy are not

independent from each other, rather they are interdependent. Therefore, they cannot afford to ignore each other. Among the many examples of this approach, are the classic approaches of Kant in the Western tradition, and Indian philosophical systems in general. Of course, in the philosophy of Nyaya the epistemological and logical concerns dominate all other aspects of philosophy. This does not mean that Nyaya did not subscribe to any metaphysical standpoint. As an allied system of Vaisesika, Nyaya admitted its metaphysics. Now we have, at least, two distinctive approaches to epistemology. They are: (1) epistemology *per se* is independent of any other branch of knowledge, (2) epistemology cannot be separated from metaphysics. The Western epistemologists in general subscribe to the former view, and their Indian counterparts to the latter. For my present study I have chosen one of the most distinguished contemporary Indian philosophers, late Professor B.K. Matilal (hereafter BKM). I propose to discuss his approach to epistemology in general.

In his book on *Perception: An Essay in Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, BKM writes that: “The dispute that lasted in a little over twelve centuries between the Nyaya and the Buddhist over the nature of perception, the critique and criteria of knowledge, and the status of the external world is undoubtedly an important chapter in the history of global philosophy.”¹ Just as we come across realism, phenomenalism, and representationalism in the Western epistemology, we also come across these doctrines in Indian philosophical systems, especially in Nyaya and Buddhism. Therefore, for any Western reader, as rightly pointed by BKM, this would be a familiar area. Another interesting point is that some modern Indian philosophers have produced illuminating expositions and reformulations of some of the speculative metaphysical doctrines with a view to highlight the traditional style of philosophizing in India. This is a laudable effort on the part of those who have undertaken this exercise of making the philosophical theories of India more prominent and appealing. Yet, the modern Indian philosophers, who are under the influence of analytical tradition of the West, may not find these doctrines all that illuminating. The reason that is attributed to this state of affairs by BKM is that these writings are opaque and blurred. I do not quite agree with BKM’s stand on this issue. Of course BKM held that most of these metaphysical theories were discussed out of context. Consequently, these most

sophisticated theories were conveniently ignored as inessential.² I personally feel that the Western epistemologists have to reconcile with the fact that these theories are not understood by the modern Western philosophers, not because they are opaque and blurred, but because their method of analysis cannot penetrate into the structural depths of the classical Indian philosophical theories. I would say that the method of analysis advocated by the modern Western epistemologists is found wanting in many respects. To put it in the language of Wittgenstein, the rules of the game played by the classical Indian philosophers are totally different from those of the game played by the modern Western philosophers.

It is opined by BKM that *pramana* method, to use Indian terminology, is invariably linked up with the *prameyas*. To quote BKM in this context: “The metaphysical doctrines of classical India developed in the background of intense intellectual activity in philosophy. Hence they are imbedded in the philosophical style that was current at that time, and this was subtly oriented by epistemological concerns and orchestrated by the logical theories of classical India.”³ BKM is right when he held that the establishment of any metaphysical theory is dependent on certain epistemological considerations (*pramanadhina prameya-sthitih*). To put it in the modern terminology, our epistemological and logical concerns precede our metaphysical and ontological ones, for the latter can be approached only with the help of the former.

II

In order to drive his point home, BKM highlighted the importance of *pramana* epistemology and its logical significance in determining our metaphysical/ontological⁴ commitments or priorities. He assumes that all of us, when we are in a pre-philosophical state, believe that there is a world external to us, and existing independent of us. This is a position taken by realists in general. However, it is not all that easy to philosophically prove or disprove this commonplace belief. For centuries together philosophers have advocated theories after theories either to establish or to falsify this commonplace belief. The existence of pre-philosophical, pre-reflective, and pre-critical certainties is always doubted by philosophers. The commonplace belief that there is a material or physical

world independent of our awareness of it is questioned by philosophers by advancing a counter thesis that the so called external reality or world is only mind-dependent and it can be vindicated by rational means. The skeptics on the other hand viewed it in a different way. According to them, it is not possible to arrive at any definite position as regards the status of material or physical world. All that philosophers could do is to advance the theories of various sorts, which often conflict with each other, to explain their position as regards the status of the material or physical world. Therefore, these theories are highly presumptuous. They are only poor substitutes for truth. This being the case, suggest BKM, “if the cloths do not fit we may either decide to remain naked or buy new ones that may fit better. The skeptics may prefer the pristine purity of nakedness, but others choose the latter.”⁵

It is generally held that when our beliefs are proven to be true they acquire the status of knowledge. One of the aims of philosophy as an activity, is to define the characteristics of knowledge, and to set forth certain criteria for obtaining knowledge in the sense in which its characteristics are defined. In this sense, claims, BKM, the purpose of epistemology or *pramana-sastra* in Indian tradition is not in any way different from that of the Western tradition. Epistemology, which is basically concerned with theory of knowledge, investigates and evaluates the evidence, our methods of reasoning, and the criteria upon which our knowledge claims are dependent.⁶ Apart from that, the common point shared by both Indian and Western philosophical traditions is, as aptly put forth by BKM, their concern for truth or reality, which is also known as divinity. Therefore, the quest for knowledge in both traditions has given rise to a number of interesting results. According to BKM, *pramana* is that which leads to a knowledge-episode called *prama* as its end.

Interestingly, evaluation of our evidence to knowledge is invariably linked up with the question of the sources of knowledge. Out of these sources, one very important source recognized by empiricist tradition in the West is sense-experience, which provides us with immediate knowledge. Accordingly, it is held that the real base for our theoretical and objective knowledge lies in observation of aspects of reality. In its weak form it is held that all our knowledge must start with sense-experience and its validation is always subject to some form of observational data.

Some *pramana* theorists in India have advocated their weaker version of the empirical tradition of the West. One of the advocates of such a position is Uddyotakara. According to him: “we emphasize perception, for all *pramanas* (in some way or other) preceded by (sensory) perception.”⁷ The result of such a position is that conception without perception is empty. The counter thesis of this claim is that perception without conception is blind. But BKM claims that this counter thesis too is incompatible with empiricist doctrine, for it advocates the view that pre-conceptual or non-conceptual perception is blind and unrevealing. However, such a non-conceptual experience is possible as advocated by the Indian epistemologists in the form of *nirvikapla pratyaksa*. But such a possibility does not deter the *pramana* theorists from advocating their theory. In fact, such a perception maintains the ontological neutrality regarding the status of concepts.

Further BKM maintains that the most important aspect of such a philosophic position is ‘experience’. Both our factual knowledge and knowledge of existence are necessarily justified on the basis of experience. If this were so, we need to define the expression ‘experience’ in clear terms. Both the Western and the Indian epistemologists are not very clear about this expression. BKM feels that the most suitable Sanskrit expression for the expression ‘experience’ is *pratiti* or *anubhava*. Like in the Indian tradition, the Western tradition too the expression ‘experience’ is used as an ultimate court of appeal for any knowledge claim. However, this argument does not stand the critical scrutiny for obvious reasons. The most immediate, non-conceptual experience is barren because it does not have any explanatory content within it. Consequently, nothing can be put forward in the form of a legitimate statement.⁸

III

BKM analyzes the various theories of perception of classical Indian type in the context of *pramana* epistemology. For this purpose first he highlights the salient features of *pramana* doctrine that inevitably resulted in a form of skepticism. One of the chief traits of skepticism is that it always questioned the very possibility of our knowledge of the external

world. Thus it remained a constant shadow of epistemology both in Indian and Western traditions. In a way, it has driven the subject of experience to think how the world ‘appears’ to the subject. Thus it paved the way for a distinction between an experience and its interpretation, between a crude sensory data and logical construction out of them.

BKM argues that empiricists claim sensory experience provides us with the ‘building blocks’ of knowledge. If what is called knowledge is constructed out of these ‘building blocks’, then the very edifice of our knowledge represents mere appearance, but not the reality. Such a treatment of knowledge made skeptic to contest the legitimacy of empiricist claim to the knowledge of the external world, for it is not established. Even the causal theory of perceptual experience is no better for it makes the subject of experience speculate about the true nature of the external world which is never given in perceptual experience. According to BKM, both the Western epistemologists and the *pramana* theorists are trapped in the same boat when they try to look for, with a sense of hesitation, some subjective element in support of our objective knowledge. Now it is left for the epistemologists of both traditions to bridge the gap between subjective and objective elements to substantiate our knowledge claims. *Pramana* theorists in general hold the view that no knowledge is possible independently of some perceptual basis or other. Even the scriptural knowledge is not exempted from this condition. They hold the view that direct experience of such people like the Buddha or the Jaina resulted in scriptural knowledge. It is believed by Naiyayikas that the Vedas are spoken by God. Hence, their validity is as sure as the validity of the statements made by a reliable and trustworthy person. Although Mimamsa does not support this claim, the Vedanta joins the camp of *pramana* theorists in this regard.

When BKM speaks of empiricism, he uses this expression with utmost caution. He does not use it as a movement that opposed the continental rationalism of the West. Following the flag of W. V. Quine, BKM holds that an empiricist doctrine is one that insists on the observational basis of our knowledge. However, there may be some do believe in the existence of mind-independent universals or realities. Such a claim to mind-independent realities does not really bar them from being empiricists. The sixth century AD philosopher Bhartihari held that all of us possess certain

amount of innate disposition to articulate concepts in speech. This is an acquired disposition, maintains BKM, for it is derived from (in a metaphysical sense) the residual (memory) traces of the experiences of every individual in countless previous births (*purvavita samskara*). This view of Bhartrhari can be compared with that of Plato. According to the latter, learning in a way is a process of recollection of that knowledge possessed by an individual before birth. The Buddhists claim that universals are mere convenient myths. Like a vehicle they are dispensable once the goal is achieved. On the contrary, Nyaya holds that some natural universals are objectively real and perceivable for they have instantiations that are perceptible. The point that BKM wants to drive home here is that although there are doctrinal differences among the various schools of Indian tradition, yet majority of the schools can be brought under the camp of *pramana* theorists.

IV

Skeptical arguments against accepted doctrines are found both in the Western and the Indian traditions of epistemology. The *pramana* theorists in general have their own arguments against the skeptics' claim that knowledge is a remote possibility. According to Nyaya epistemology, perhaps one of the earliest arguments against the challenges of skepticism, we can know what is out there with the help of *pramana*. Therefore, the object of knowledge (*prameya*) is definitely known. Before the emergence of full-fledged philosophical systems in India, there were ancient skeptics like Sanjaya and others (between 600 to 100 BC) who directed their skepticism against the possibility knowledge pertaining to moral, religious, and eschatological matters. Sanjaya questioned the veracity of the statements made about these matters. According to BKM, the following questions never found any satisfactory answers. Therefore, they remained unexplained. They are as follows:⁹

1. Does anything survive death?
2. Is the world finite?
3. Is there a soul different from body?

4. Does he who acts 'enjoy', i.e., get reward and punishment?
5. What is right and what is wrong?

The skepticism about the truth-claims of the above mentioned questions gradually paved the way for the skepticism about the truth claims of the very possibility of knowledge. It is in fact in the writings of Nagarjuna (2nd century AD), the great Madhyamika Buddhist, one can come across a systematic and skeptical challenge to a theory of knowledge. Later on it was the skeptics like Jayarasi (8th century AD) and Sriharsa (11th century AD) questioned the claims to knowledge. There were also the skeptics in the form of monistic metaphysicians who were critical of *pramana* method. Thus there was a constant debate between the advocates of *pramana* theory and the skeptics.

The skeptical dialecticians of India followed a 'radical' method to expose the knowledge-claims of the epistemologists. They contested that the very concept of knowledge and its foundations are either paradoxical or circular. BKM defends the Indian skeptics like Nagarjuna, Sanjaya, Jayarasi, and Sriharsa for they have not indulged in the construction of any metaphysical system. Although it is true of Sanjaya and Jayarasi, it is not the case with Nagarjuna and Sriharsa. BKM admits that it is arguable whether Nagarjuna and Jayarasi have subscribed to any metaphysical position at all. Perhaps, the skepticism advocated by them is only a complementary to their soteriological goal in the sense that it serves as a ladder to climb up, and then to be discarded. The aim of these two skeptics is to show the limitations of pure reason in sorting out the knowledge claims of one sort or other. In the process of resolving the rival knowledge claims pure reason would lose itself in the quicksand of contradictions. In fact it is held in the *Lankavatara-sutra*: "The own nature of things cannot be ascertained by the analytical exercise of intellect (*Buddhi*). Therefore, they (the things) are shown to be ineffable and 'without own nature.'"¹⁰ This statement suggests that reason cannot discover the real nature of things. In a way, it is a reminder to the rationalists of traditions that reason cannot penetrate into the very nature of things.

BKM believes that philosophical empiricism is ingrained in some form of skepticism. The very problem of uncertainty regarding the claims to knowledge necessitated epistemologists of both traditions to look for

secure foundations of knowledge that rest on direct evidence (experience). The *pramana* theorists subscribed to only a weaker form of empiricism. According to them, sense-experience is only a starting point of knowledge. The reason is that most of them advocated other sources of knowledge apart from sense-experience. On the contrary, the skeptics held that there is an inherent contradiction between the data offered by experience and reason. Such a contradiction always leads to skepticism but not to any legitimate theory of knowledge. For instance, Nagarjuna put forth the following argument to justify his claim that there is no possibility of obtaining knowledge. The paraphernalia that we use to measure or obtain knowledge is itself in need of justification. If this point is conceded then the question of arriving at knowledge of any kind is a remote possibility for this process ends up in an infinite regress argument. Thus Nagarjuna's argument remains a great impediment to *pramana* theorists for knowledge in any form is an impossible proposition. If this argument is not conceded then our choice of selecting a particular standard of measurement is completely arbitrary and not really appealing to reason. A Cartesian follower might say that one can choose a standard of measurement that is highly indubitable and self-evidently true. But the skeptics like Nagarjuna would object to this proposal for the search for an indubitable criterion necessarily involves subjective element into the whole process. This may not be acceptable to those epistemologists who insist on some objective standards of criteria.

In order to defend their position, the *pramana* theorists, in spite of their different ontological commitments, would agree that whatever exists can be known. Further, they argue that whatever is known is existent. Consequently, it is effable in the sense that it is expressible or nameable in language. Of course, there are some *pramana* theorists who hold the view that knowability is not a sufficient condition for affability. This is not treated as a major impediment. According to Bhartrhari, human consciousness always reveals the objects (knowables) with the help of words for it is ever vibrating. In the absence of such a mechanism, the revelatory character of human awareness is destroyed. Perception or awareness of any sort would be meaningless in the absence of word-mediated act of consciousness. Nyaya does not subscribe to this view for it admits perception or awareness without effability. This is due to the fact that there are objects or knowables that are only known or revealed to

human consciousness, but may not be expressible through the medium of language. To use Wittgenstein's terminology, they can be called "mystical".

According to BKM, the thesis of 'ineffability' may be viewed from different standpoints. According to one interpretation, what is grasped by the senses (perceptual experience) cannot be put into words or language, for language is a social affair and it can only communicate those aspects of reality that are inter-subjectively accessible. Since perceptual experiences are unique to each subject, the content of such experiences cannot be communicated. BKM holds that such a view can be, with minor modifications, attributed to the Buddhist doctrines advocated by Dinnaga and Dharmakirti. Both these philosophers have subscribed to what is called phenomenalism, and logical atomism in modern terminology. Just as Russell held that there must be logically proper names in any ideal language, although one cannot give an example for it, Dinnaga too held that the pure particular or pure sense-datum cannot be, in principle, communicated. Thus it remains ineffable (*anirdesya*).¹¹ The other interpretation is holistic in its nature. Accordingly, it regards the reality as a single indivisible whole, which is undifferentiated. Since the whole cannot be grasped in its fullness, language reduces it into parts resulting in the proliferation of concepts. Consequently, all our concepts enter into some contradiction or other. As long as language operates with the help of concepts, it fails to picture reality.

V

Another interesting feature that we come across in the empiricist tradition of the West is the cleavage made between *a priori* (non-empirical) and *a posteriori* (empirical) forms of knowledge. The former is the knowledge obtained independent of experience and the latter is necessarily dependent upon sense-experience. Such a distinction is not found in the Indian epistemological tradition. This may be treated, according to BKM, as a lacuna in the *pramana* theory advocated by the Indian epistemologists. For the sake of convenience, BKM classifies knowledge into non-empirical and empirical forms. The scriptural knowledge or the knowledge of *dharma* can be characterized as non-empirical knowledge for it cannot be derived through any empirical means such as perception or inference. Here the expression '*dharma*' is used in its loose sense to cover religious, social

and ethical duties of individuals. And we cannot obtain knowledge of these matters empirically. This is the reason why the skeptics like Sanjaya did not entertain any questions regarding these matters for knowledge about these matters is impossible. What BKM wants to stress here is that the scriptures impart non-empirical or trans-empirical knowledge. *Pramana* theorists recognized this form of knowledge for the tradition defines scripture as the “means (in fact, “knowledge-how”) that can be known by neither perception nor inference is what they come to know through scriptures. And this constitutes the scripture-hood of the scriptures.”¹²

What is unique and significant about the scriptural knowledge is that it is highly infallible. It is held by the great *vaidika* philosophers like Bhartrhari and Samkara that the knowledge obtained by empirical means such as perception and inference may be fallible at times. BKM calls it a kind of fundamentalism for our knowledge derived from the authority of scriptures remains infallible because there is no empirical means that can ever falsify it. To record the statement of Samkara in this context: “The truth (knowledge-hood) of the Vedic statements is self-established independently of anything else. It is like the sun which reveals itself while revealing colours.”¹³ Thus scriptural knowledge is self-validating. Another important argument advanced by *pramana* theorists in general is that scriptures being apocryphal there is no human agency involved in their creation. They are the creations of the divine (*apauruseya*). If a statement is false, its falsity can be traced back to the shortcomings of those who propounded it. But in the absence of an author it is treated valid. This amounts to a dogma. However, BKM puts forward the following considerations to avoid the charge of dogmatism.

The *Mahabharata* and *Manusmṛti* held that the truth of *dharma* is beyond human comprehension. However it can be obtained by the means such as scripture, the verdict of the saints and seers, and one’s own conscience or moral intuition. It is on the notion of intuition or *pratibha* that Bhartrhari has something to say. He clearly demarcated intuition from perception and inference.¹⁴ Intuition occurs to us like a flash. It is altogether a different type of experience. Intuition occurs in all sentient beings in a spontaneous manner. Such a form of knowledge, according to Bhartrhari, is far more reliable than any other form of knowledge for it is direct and immediate. But BKM argues that although it is not clear from Bhartrhari’s

interpretation of intuitive knowledge whether it can be treated as non-empirical or empirical, it is a clear case of non-empirical form of knowledge. Further BKM alleges that Naiyayikas, the most prominent *pramana* theorists, find it difficult to accommodate it in their classification of empirical forms of knowledge. The scriptural knowledge as viewed by Bhartrhari, is the highest form of intuitive knowledge.

Contrary to the view advocated by Bhartrhari, Naiyayikas argued that scriptural knowledge must have some empirical base. They ridiculed the view that the scriptural texts have no author. Just as the veracity of any statement is dependent on the trustworthiness of its author or speaker, the veracity of the scriptural statements must also be dependent on the infallibility of their author. Therefore, according to Naiyayikas, the author of the scriptural statements must be person with perfect knowledge, and he is none other than God. BKM maintains that the notion of ‘trustworthy person’ can be saved from its sectarian colour and theistic overtone once we accept the Buddha and the Jaina as trustworthy (*apta*) persons. The truth of *dharma* is known through their intuitive insight that is non-empirical in its character. Our religious and moral prescriptions are based on the knowledge of scriptures and the knowledge of *dharma*.

Coming to the empirical foundations of our knowledge, *pramana* theorists hold that all our cognitive knowledge has empirical base. In this context, BKM cautions us that - unlike in the Western tradition - there is no dichotomy made between facts and values in order to understand the basis of our secular, religious, and moral beliefs. In a nutshell, the following are the features of *pramana-prameya* doctrine advocated by the Indian epistemologists.¹⁵

1. There are valid means or sources of knowledge on the basis of which we make assertions about what exists, and what is true.
2. There are entities called knowables (*prameya*), and each knowable is cognizable. They constitute the world or reality. Each knowable entity can be grasped or apprehended by our knowledge-episodes.
3. There is no distinction between means of knowing and its justification. The means themselves justify what is known.
4. *Pramana* theorists are in agreement with the view that like the sensation of pain, knowledge episode is an event.

5. All knowledge-episodes are cognitive episodes, but not all cognitive episodes are knowledge episodes, for some cognitive episodes may not yield truth.

Every *pramana*, maintains BKM, is both evidential and causal in its nature. It is evidential for it provides ample justification for the cognitive episode. It is causal for it is responsible for any cognitive episode. Therefore it is treated as an 'instrument' (*karana*) and most effective causal factor (*sadhakatama*) of the knowledge-episode in question. A *pramana* is that which measures. What is to be measured is called *prameya*. In this sense, *pramana* leads us to such cognitive episodes by means of which we can understand the nature of reality unerringly.

However, reminds BKM, the skeptical challenge to *pramana* theorists does not end there. Both an empiricist and a *pramana* theorist have to spell out clearly the status and the nature of entities that they experience, and believe to be there. The pre-philosophical or pre-analytical belief in the existence of external world independent of perceiver's consciousness has to be justified. The skeptic argues that how can a *pramana* theorist rationally justify his claim that there is an external world independent of perceiver's mind. What are those indubitable data that serve as the foundation of his knowledge-claim? If the data obtained from his most immediate experience serves as indubitable foundation of his knowledge-claim, then the very nature of that data is under investigation. It is held by the skeptic that the data obtained from one's immediate experience are always subjective, for they are not accessible to others. How can anyone use these subjective data to construct a system of objective knowledge? As rightly pointed by BKM, there are two alternatives left for a *pramana* theorist to explain away his position. According to the first alternative, he must admit that the objects are exactly the same as those that we experience in our pre-philosophical and pre-reflective mood. Thus the world is constituted by middle-sized, measurable, material objects. The second alternative is that he must construct objects out of the data obtained from his immediate experience to give a philosophical justification to his knowledge-claim. These two alternatives led to an age-old controversy between realists and phenomenals and immaterialists. For instance, BKM characterizes the Nyaya realism and the Buddhist

phenomenalism in the following manner.¹⁶ The following are the features of Nyaya realism.

1. What we directly perceive in our sense-experience is the external reality that exists independent of the perceiving subject.

2. All the physical objects, wholes, bodies, and their properties can be seen and touched. We see and touch wholes and substrata because they possess parts and properties, but not because we are able to see and touch these wholes and parts. But in the case of smell, taste, and hear, we do not smell the flower but the fragrance of the flower, we do not taste sugar, but its sweetness, we do not hear the train, but only its whistle.

3. The whole is a distinct entity created by arranging the parts, yet it is not the sum total of its parts. It is over and above the parts. Similarly, a substratum is distinct from its properties it instantiates. In other words, properties subsist in substratum.

4. Either perceiving or seeing is regarded as knowing in the direct sense. There is no secure or basic foundation other than perceiving or seeing which is indubitable or certain.

5. Although knowledge is not always verbalized, it is verbalizable.

6. Perceptual illusions can be analyzed without bringing in the notion of sense-datum or sense-impression as an intermediary between the perceiver and the external world.

7. Knowledge in its ordinary sense is neither self-revealing nor self-validating. In other words, it is not necessary that every cognitive event must be noticed or perceived. There is always a possibility that some cognitive events may occur and pass away unnoticed and unperceived. In order to communicate the occurrence of a cognitive event in any form of language it must be inwardly perceived by the subject in question. This inward experience is called (*anuvyavasaya*). One's experience of pain and pleasure come under this category.

In contrast to Nyaya realism, the Buddhist phenomenalism can be characterized in the following manner:

1. What we directly aware of in our perception is only a sensible quality, and it is doubtful whether such a quality exists independent of its

instantiation. Also, it is doubted whether an instantiation exist independent of our sensation of it.

2. What we call material objects, physical objects, and wholes are only perceived only in a secondary or metaphorical sense for we do not have direct access to anything other than their sensible qualities which are directly given in perception. In other words, we infer the existence of material objects, physical objects, and wholes from their sensible qualities.

3. The so-called material or physical objects are nothing but constructions out of sensory phenomena. A whole is not independent of its parts taken together. The wholes have only nominal existence (*samvrtisat*). They are objects of either unconscious inference or desire-dominated construction. As regards unconscious inference, which is a form of *vikalpa*, it has mere psychological certainty, but not the required logical certainty. Therefore, such inferential awareness cannot be equated with knowledge proper.

4. In its most immediate sense, sensing is identified with knowing. Hence, sensing is the foundation of knowledge. It is indubitable and incorrigible.

5. Such knowledge is not verbalizable, for it is completely free from conception. There is no scope for verbalization without concepts.

6. The entity perceived in perceptual illusion is not distinct from the cognition itself. What is given in sense-illusion is an integral part of the sensation itself.

7. Knowledge is always self-revealing. Every cognitive event would be noticed. In other words, no cognitive event can pass away unnoticed. Like pleasure and pain every cognitive event is self-cognized.

The above cited world-views share the view that the basic elements of our experience are observable or perceptible individuals. But the nature of these individuals is treated differently in both world-views. According to the realist view of Nyaya-Vaisesika, the observable individuals are physical and the observable phenomena are always explained in terms of the physical. Contrary to this view, the Buddhist phenomenologists hold that there is nothing beyond phenomenal, therefore, everything is reduced to observable phenomena. In spite of these differences, there is another common point shared by both. They view that an ontological system must be properly grounded in epistemology in the sense that what

is epistemologically prior must be the starting point of their respective ontologies. For a realist what is epistemologically prior is physical entities with properties. On the contrary, a phenomenalist considers what is directly apprehended in one's sense-experience, namely, the phenomenal qualities, become their epistemological priorities.

To conclude: the contemporary Indian approaches to epistemology in many respects resemble the approaches of the Western epistemologists. In fact, it is one's own ontological priority that paves the way for a suitable or convenient epistemological doctrine. It is through the latter that the former gets substantiated or vindicated. The perennial philosophical problems, whether epistemological or metaphysical/ontological, are common to both the Indian and the Western philosophical systems. The controversy between the realists and phenomenals as regards the nature of observables in the West is akin to the controversy between the Nyaya realists and the Buddhist phenomenals in the classical Indian tradition. BKM consistently highlighted the point that the controversies and issues that dominated the modern Western epistemology are very much found in classical Indian epistemology too. The Western epistemologists cannot ignore the contributions made by the classical Indian philosophers to the traditional theory of knowledge. In the Indian context, epistemology cannot be segregated from metaphysics/ontology. It is through epistemology that every school of thought justifies its metaphysical presuppositions. In other words, our epistemological concerns are basically rooted in our commitment to a certain type of metaphysics/ontology. Since metaphysical/ontological commitments vary from school to school, there are bound to be differences in their epistemological priorities too. This naturally results in the proliferation of 'isms'. One cannot deny this fact.

ENDNOTES

¹ B.K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.1.

² Ibid., p.8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Normally it is held that metaphysics deals with the nature of highest reality, which may be transcendental. Those who are averse to using this expression,

especially those who claim to be ant-metaphysicians in the West like Marxists, the modern empiricists(logical positivists), preferred the term ontology to metaphysics to deal with the ultimate nature of reality, which is not transcendental. But, there are philosophers who interchangeably use these expressions to deal with the ultimate constituents of reality.

⁵ Ibid., p.21.

⁶ Ibid.,p.22.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.,p.23.

⁹ Ibid.p.27.

¹⁰ *Lankavatara-sutra*, ch.II, verse.173; Ch.X, verse 167.

¹¹ B.K.Matilal, *Perception*, p.30.

¹² Ibid.,p.32.

¹³ Ibid.,p.35.

¹⁴ Ibid.,p.33.

¹⁵ Ibid.,pp.35-6.

¹⁶ Ibid.,pp.5-6.